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Commentary on: Linda Carozza's "Diversity, conflict, and (dis)agreement"

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Linda Carozza gives all of us much to ponder. I take her overarching point to be that a Critical-Logical perspective on argumentation generates neither adequate descriptions of argumentative discourse nor well-justified assessments of its reasonableness. The Critical-Logical perspective brings into clear focus one set of resources people draw on when they engage in argumentation (those that are logical in a broad and nontechnical sense and that can readily be sorted into verbally reconstructed claims and reasons). But it blinds us to other resources. The other resources to which this perspective blinds us include other argument modalities identified by Gilbert (1997): the emotional, the visceral, and the kisceral. Carozza (and also Gilbert) contend that the other modalities make indispensable contributions to rationality, and that the Critical-Logical perspective threatens them instead as threats to rationality.

I leave to others the question of whether this charge against Critical-Logical perspectives is entirely fair. I want to focus instead on the conceptual shift Carozza recommends to argumentation theorists—away from taking logical thought as the normative center of argumentation and toward seeing the possibility of other competing idealizations of rationality. To this shift I subscribe wholeheartedly. When we study logical thought and when we invent logical systems to aid in logical thought, there is very little doubt that we can improve logical thought—but there *is* doubt about the extent to which improving logical thought is the same as improving argumentation.

Carozza explores this point for the case of conflict resolution, using a third party mediation of interpersonal conflict as case material. There does seem to be a fundamental lack of fit between logical methods and actual obstacles faced in trying to resolve conflicts over goals. If one wants to improve outcomes in dispute mediation, *different* methods are needed, such as expanding goal sets and encouraging participants to be more realistic in what they expect to achieve. Mediation is mostly about open-ended practical reasoning, not about deciding whether to accept specific positions as adequately supported. Third party dispute mediation is in this sense rather special, and one would not want to generalize to all argumentative discourse based on its special norms. But we can ask Carozza's question for other distinctive kinds of argumentative discussion. Put bluntly, the question is, if we could impose the Critical-Logical ideal in a certain classes of discussions, would that improve or worsen the practice of argumentation in those discussion?

My own answer to these questions has been (Jackson, 2018) that naturally occurring argument has its own natural normativity that is far more basic than the idealizations of the Critical-Logical perspective. Logical thought, especially guided by systematic methods, can help people discipline their own reasoning and figure out what (if anything) is wrong with someone else's reasoning. Often, this is useful. But attempting to privilege these methods in every

situation flips them into a threat to human rationality—by ruling out serious consideration of anything that cannot be externalized as a well-formed premise. (Gilbert, 1997, p. 61, makes the same point: “When an approach is official, when it is presented as the only way to proceed, or as the only correct way to proceed, . . . then its power is too great.” When that happens, he says, logic itself becomes illogical.) Arguments laid out logically, even apparently sound ones, remain subject to doubt originating in Gilbert’s nonlogical modalities (the emotional, the visceral, and the kisceral). Each of which plays a non-substitutable role in generating beliefs, intentions, and actions.

Carozza focuses on the role of emotion in the mediation she analyzed. In materials I work with, intuition plays an analogous role, specifically in generating beliefs about cause and effect. Inferring that B caused A from observation that A followed B is fallacious; but no one makes this inference simply from the fact of A following B. (We know this because life is an endless stream of event following event, while causal inference is infrequent.) Only some co-occurrences trigger a causal inference, and this triggering is intuitive, grounded in unarticulated perceptual information and vast stores of tacit world knowledge. So when a person observes A following B and infers that B caused A, the actual basis for the inference is not simply A following B, but also other “grounds” for noticing this particular linkage and wondering whether B might have caused A. Some of these grounds may be difficult or impossible to put into words.

This very pattern occurs repeatedly within the ongoing controversy over mandatory childhood vaccination. (I discuss this in my own paper at this conference.) In a small number of cases among the many vaccinations given to children each year, a parent observes what appears to be a “vaccine injury”: an adverse reaction to the vaccination. Certainly it is possible that the occurrence of (say) febrile seizures soon after vaccination is purely coincidental, but parental reports often make reference to the intuitive basis for suspecting a causal connection. Intuition—for example, an immediate sense that something is just not right, even before the appearance of symptoms—is often part of the parents’ reasoning but is almost never part of the critical reconstruction of parents’ reasoning. From the parent’s point of view, it is not the temporal association, but other things observed and felt, that give rise to the causal inference.

Through the Critical-Logical lens, parents’ reports are reduced to “after therefore because of” and summarily rejected, time after time. Even though it is widely understood that vaccinations of all kinds carry small risks of adverse reactions, every *individual* parent who reports adverse reactions to their child’s vaccination is told basically the same thing, that they have reasoned fallaciously. And if they report what they experienced (for example, on social media) they are accused of spreading dangerous dis-information. This is what I meant by saying that logic can all-too-easily flip from being a useful tool to being a kind of weapon. Whatever one believes about vaccination injury, shouldn’t we acknowledge that our systematic methods may be *unable* to confirm what our unanalyzable intuition can grasp? And shouldn’t we admit that this is a limitation—not a strength--of the methods themselves?

All of Gilbert’s modalities operate simultaneously in argument as it occurs naturally, in the course of ordinary human activities. Even under ideal conditions for testing the bases for competing beliefs, people do not turn off their emotions, their bodily experience, or their intuition. None of these various modalities automatically trump the results of the others. We can use logic to probe other influences on our beliefs, but we can also use our other resources to warn us that something is amiss in what seems to be good logic.

I’ll end these remarks by giving a shout-out to some colleagues in communication whose work seems to me to have special relevance to Carozza’s project of broadening argumentation

theory. Jean Goodwin's version of normative pragmatics (Goodwin, 2007, 2013; Goodwin & Innocenti, 2019) shows that the work arguers do includes the negotiation of normative frameworks as well as positions, and this can be seen in the details of how they design their contributions. Bob Craig and Karen Tracy (1995) have championed 'grounded practical theory' as a design-friendly way to discover normative frameworks—they call them "situated ideals"—within any standardized practice of interest. Dale Hample's work on goals and intentional systems (Hample, 2005; Hample et al., 2005; Hample & Irions, 2015; Hample et al., 2016) is particularly relevant for the attention he and his colleagues have given to emotion and identity. Scott Jacobs and Mark Aakhus, as I've already mentioned, have taken up these issues in extensive studies of third party mediation. These scholars and others who approach argumentation from a communicational perspective have attempted to grapple with the diversity of resources people draw on both in generating their own conclusions and in reacting to others. They are at least a good start on the more diversified approach that Carozza recommends. In communication, Carozza's conclusions will be warmly embraced.

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